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C O N F I D E N T I A L RANGOON 001015

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SUBJECT: BURMA: THAI FM FINDS GOOD HEALTH, GOOD VIBES AMONG SENIOR GENERALS

REF: RANGOON 989 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: CDA Shari Villarosa for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

1. (SBU) Summary: Thai FM Kantathi Suphamongkhon made a 24-hour visit to Rangoon August 31-September 1, his first to Burma as Foreign Minister. The highlight of the trip was a bilateral meeting with State Peace and Development (SPDC) Chairman Than Shwe, joined by Vice Chairman Maung Aye and other top regime generals. The visit met a Thai objective to rebuild a rapport with the regime in the post-Khin Nyunt era, and also helped extinguish lingering rumors that Than Shwe had recently suffered a serious medical setback or that he and Maung Aye are involved in a power struggle. All signs indicate that Than Shwe remains firmly at the top of the food chain and faces no immediate threat to his authority. End Summary.

2. (U) FM Kantathi, who arrived by a "special flight" on August 31, met on the morning of September 1 with SPDC Chairman Senior General Than Shwe. The scheduled thirty-minute courtesy call, which took place at the "Credentials Hall" of the Parliament Building, turned into a broad exchange of views and lasted nearly an hour and half. Joining Than Shwe were SPDC Vice Chairman Vice Senior General Maung Aye, SPDC member and Joint Chief of Staff General Thura Shwe Mann, Prime Minister General Soe Win, Secretary-1 Lt-Gen Thein Sein, and FM Nyan Win.

3. (C) According to a Thai Embassy source, who spent most of the visit with FM Kantathi, Senior General Than Shwe was in "very good" health, taking the lead and spending the first 35 minutes of the bilateral meeting briefing Kantathi "without a pause." The Thai source observed that Maung Aye made no interventions at the meeting, but added that relations among the top generals appeared to be entirely normal, with no signs of disunity or friction.

4. (C) The Thai Embassy source added that neither Than Shwe nor Kantathi raised any contentious issues, since this was "a first visit, designed to establish a good rapport." Kantathi, said the source, did not raise the detention of Aung San Suu Kyi (although he apparently intimated he had done so in a post-meeting press conference in Rangoon). Than Shwe did raise issues related to ASSK and the National League for Democracy (NLD) in his opening brief.

5. (C) According to the Thai Embassy, Kantathi stuck to his schedule, although he dropped several "private visits" to tourist sites in order to phone his counterpart in Kuala Lumpur to discuss an urgent situation involving dozens of Thai citizens crossing the Thai-Malaysian border (NFI). Kantathi visited the University for Development of National Races, where he made a two million Baht cash donation, and held a separate bilateral meeting with FM Nyun Win.

6. (C) Comment: Although very few local observers still cling to last week's speculation that Than Shwe had recently suffered a debilitating medical setback or that Than Shwe and Maung Aye are involved in a power struggle (reftels), Kantathi's visit finally extinguished rumors that persisted because the regime's top two leaders had not made a public appearance since the rumors began. Health problems or intra-regime tensions are not out of the question, but all signs indicate that Than Shwe remains firmly at the top of the heap. End Comment.

Villarosa